



RECOMMENDATION 12

Support Family Caregivers

STRATEGY 30

Increase Access to Employment and Well-Being Support for Family Caregivers

- a. The North Carolina General Assembly can support older adult employees and caregivers of older adults, people with disabilities, and children by:
 - i. Implementing family and medical leave for all state employees.
 - ii. Adopting policies like Family Medical Leave Insurance and requirements that employers allow employees to earn a minimum number of paid sick or personal leave days and allow them to request flexible work without penalty.
 - iii. Exploring policies that support business owners who want to adopt family-friendly workplace policies.
 - iv. Exploring policies to support counseling and support services for family caregivers.
- b. The North Carolina Division of Aging and Adult Services and Area Agencies on Aging identify opportunities to strengthen support of local outreach efforts for family caregivers to facilitate good nutrition, falls prevention, access to essential transportation, safe housing, and social connectedness.

Desired Result – Family caregivers will have reduced stress and more flexible employment that will allow them to care for older adult family members living at home.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy? – Family caregiving’s essential role in the health and well-being of older adults provides opportunities for legislative and employer support. As our state population continues to age, it is imperative that policymakers respond to the needs of family and other informal caregivers. If these caregivers are supported, they may be better equipped to identify and seek out solutions for aging-related issues with their loved ones.

Context – There are an estimated 1.28 million family caregivers in North Carolina who provide over 1 billion hours of care per year.^{8,8} Family caregiving is uncompensated and often poses physical, emotional, and financial challenges. Nationally, around 30% of caregivers are in the “sandwich” generation – those who are raising children or grandchildren as they support an aging family member.⁸

Overall, caregivers are more likely to report psychological distress and symptoms of depression compared to non-caregivers, with growing emotional consequences as caregiving demands increase.^{38–40} Additionally, caregivers may need to reduce their work hours or leave their careers entirely. Since women are more likely than men to fill more intensive caregiving duties, this time away from paid work exacerbates the gender pay gap.^{41,42} For these reasons, a holistic approach to addressing the physical and practical needs of family caregivers is needed, including attention to emotional well-being. Providing access to counseling and support services can assist caregivers in coping with the emotional challenges of providing care.

Caregiving Among Diverse Populations

The caregiving experience is variable based on resource availability, social support, and perceptions and expectations about caregiving for older adults. In addition, the experiences and cultural beliefs of different racial and ethnic groups impact use of long-term services and supports.⁸ On average:

- More Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino caregivers are “involved in high-intensity care, which is marked by tending to someone with greater care needs” and “are more likely than other caregivers to report feeling a sense of purpose in caregiving, even when that care is intense (AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving 2020).”
- Black/African American caregivers “often provide care alone with no other help.”
- Hispanic/Latino caregivers “tend to be younger and more often have children under age 18 still at home.”
- American Indian and Alaska Native family caregivers “report a sense of reward and satisfaction from caregiving that is attributed to cultural attitudes toward older persons and collective care, even despite experiencing some stress as well.”⁸

LGBTQ family caregivers, who represent around 9% of all caregivers, are also uniquely affected by caregiving responsibilities. Legal authority can present barriers to these caregivers when providing care to chosen (rather than genetic or legal) family or to a partner with whom the relationship has not been legalized.

Caregiving and Employment Considerations

Most family caregivers work either full-time or part-time, with a majority (54%) working in hourly wage positions.⁸ Employment presents unique challenges to family caregivers who must balance their caregiving and work responsibilities. One survey found that around 20% of working caregivers had to leave their job to maintain their caregiving responsibilities, while 40% reduced their hours to part-time.⁴³ This is likely because paid sick and paid family leave are uncommon in the workforce. In North Carolina, about 78% of workers (4 million) do not have access to paid family leave through their employer.⁴⁴

⁸ AARP’s report defines a family caregiver as “Any relative, partner, friend, or neighbor who has a significant personal relationship with, and who provides a broad range of assistance for, an older person or an adult with a chronic, disabling, or serious health condition.”

Paid Leave

Paid family and medical leave refers to the ability to take a leave of absence for a “worker’s own serious, longer-term health condition, to care for a family member with a serious health condition, or to care for or bond with a new child, and for reasons related to a family’s member’s military service.”⁴⁵ Nationally, only 23% of workers had access to paid family leave in 2021.⁴⁵ Access to paid family leave varies by income, with only 6% of those with the lowest incomes having paid family leave compared to 43% of those with the highest incomes.⁴⁶ Nine states and the District of Columbia have enacted paid family and medical leave laws.^c

State employees in North Carolina are now eligible for up to eight weeks of parental leave that may be used for the care of a newborn or adopted child, but not for other family members.⁴⁷

How would this impact the health of older adults?



Family caregivers who have adequate employment options that include in-person, hybrid, and online opportunities and well-being supports will be able to provide care for older adults to help them continue to live at home. This care can help to reduce the risk of falls, enhance mobility, ensure adequate nutrition, and provide social connections.



Sarah is a mother and grandmother and has the joy of living with her daughter, Amy, and Amy’s family. Sarah helps around the house as much as she can by making sure her grandchildren complete their homework and cooking occasional meals. She has a few

health conditions that require regular visits to doctors and specialists, which Amy helps her coordinate and attends with her. Sarah used to be worried that this would interfere with Amy’s work schedule, but Amy’s employer has provided flexibility to allow for family caregiving needs. This flexibility has meant that the family can continue to support each other in a variety of ways while not adding additional stress to their lives. Sarah is secure in knowing that she can continue aging in place with her family since Amy has found a balance between her professional and caregiving roles.

**This is a composite story that represents the experiences of caregivers and multi-generational families.*

c States that have enacted paid family and medical leave laws, as of 2021, are California, Colorado, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington.